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Spring 2015

# Are Historically Black Colleges and Universities Necessary? It's Not that Black and White

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### Recommended Citation

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Are Historically Black Colleges and  
Universities Necessary? :  
It's Not That Black and White

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Liberal Studies*

by

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May 2015

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*Winter Park, Florida*

## **Introduction**

How relevant are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)? They have been relevant to me for as long as I can remember. Before I was a senior in high school, I made a choice to attend an HBCU. Several factors went into my decision: (1) my family's opinion about HBCU's, (2) growing up in an inner -city community (where HBCUs were the only institutions of higher learning mentioned), and (3) my educational experience at Hungerford Prep High School.

I was raised in an urban, lower-middle class community where everyone knew one another. I lived across the street from the Citrus Bowl where the Florida Classic football game is played every year. We charged spectators to park in our apartment complex so that we could buy tickets to the game. The atmosphere at the games was electric. Thousands of Black people savored the beauty, food, and culture of the Florida Classic. Growing up, I heard countless stories from teachers and peers about HBCUs. Their opinions were either highly positive or severely negative. Nevertheless, I wanted to know for myself.

My guidance counselor had banners of Florida A&M University (FAMU) on her wall. I remember that she would leave early on the Friday before Homecoming weekend so that she could make it to Tallahassee in time for the festivities. I also remember that, on Monday, she would come back to school with dozens of photographs of colorful, educated, Black people wearing the colors of their alma matas. She would point out her classmates in the photographs, pointing to the lawyer, the doctor, the engineer, the teacher, and the former football player. I had never seen so many educated African Americans in one setting. My parents were advocates for education, but neither one of them completed college. The more

pictures my guidance counselor showed me, the more I got lost in them. It was my version of heaven.

I began my journey at FAMU a few years later. I imagined that college was an enlightening experience for everyone, and I was correct. The lessons I learned while attending FAMU were life altering. I learned how to be assertive about my community without being militant. I became concerned about issues that directly affected my community and I was surrounded by individuals who felt the way I did. I learned to embrace my culture for its uniqueness. I learned how to transform my ideas into actions. More importantly, I learned that Black people matter. I found my voice at FAMU.

When it came time for me to prepare a master's thesis it was natural for me to gravitate to an issue that I am both passionate and curious about. My thesis is written in two parts. The first part is a set of spoken word pieces I prepared, expressing my connection to HBCUs. It is important that the reader understands the type of environment I came from and what led me to pursue a higher education at an HBCU. Spoken word poetry often entails a certain aggression, honesty, and grit, rendering this most appropriate.

I take the conversation surrounding HBCUs personally, and I feel it is my responsibility to acknowledge some of the stereotypes about them as well as highlight their achievements and point out the areas in which they could improve. With my creative section, I intend for the reader to feel the intensity and the undying spirit of HBCUs.

The second section of this paper offers a research perspective to complement the pieces presented in the poetry section. The research portion focuses less on the individual and

more on the large effect that HBCUs have had on higher education in the U.S. My own curiosity moved me to write the second section.

Recently, I have found myself in debates about closing HBCUs and what it would mean for higher education. In 2008, my friends and I talked about the election of President Barak Obama and whether or not it would help or hurt HBCUs. I wanted to know for myself how important HBCUs are on the spectrum of higher education. The second section seeks to determine how necessary HBCU's are to American education. To answer this question, I outline the history and the importance of education for Black people pre- and post-slavery. The conversation continues with a history of HBCUs. I articulate various arguments designed to demonstrate that HBCU's are necessary. From a personal and ethical standpoint, HBCUs are still valuable and are arguably this country's most successful yet underrated institutions.

# Spoken Word Pieces

## **Chapter One:**

### Spoken Word

#### Dear HBCUs

Dear HBCUs:

This is a letter to let you know that if your fight matters to no one else,  
I see you.

And even if you only reach me, no matter where I go,  
a part of me will always be reaching for you.

And if everyone else stops coming,  
I will keep showing up.

And if everyone no longer contributes their funding,  
I will be the hopeful girl on the corner,  
bucket and sign in hand,  
never giving up.

I am in love with your stride,  
the way that despite the most deprived of circumstances,  
you educated the disenfranchised  
and developed them into leaders.

You transformed them into believers,  
made them teachers,  
lawyers,  
and preachers.

Your swag educated the man who had the audacity  
to tell segregated America that he had a dream.

Your swag educated a woman  
to write about the irony of desiring the “bluest eye.”

Your swag kept the Black hope alive.

It made Black people believe they were worth more

than Jim Crow laws and unfit conditions.

Your education altered their souls' condition.

So, I am writing you this letter to let you know  
that your efforts have not been in vein.

When the world has forgotten your contributions,  
I will remember all of your names.

You stand in the middle of the community  
to manifest, despite their environment, leaders.

You worked tirelessly to make the illiterate read  
and the fragile strong.

When White America doubted you,  
you continued with your plan all along.

Year by year, your head rose a little higher.

Your stride became confident and strong.

You fulfilled your mission.

You created a haven.

So just in case you worry your days are numbered  
and no one longer recognizes the courage in your art.

And just in case your heart is hardened because  
you feel the rage of the world's teeth tearing you apart.

And just in case you no longer see reason to continue  
to fight for a people whom you think no longer need you.

And just in case you wonder where your future lies  
in an America that refuses to financially support you.

And just in case you consider shutting your library windows  
and locking your dormitory doors.

And just in case you ponder closing your lunchrooms  
and letting the curtains down on the theater floors.



And just in case the band stops playing,  
and the drum majors go away.  
And just in case the choir stops singing,  
and the Negro spirituals start to fade.  
And just in case you debate cancelling the Homecoming games,  
and the football players no longer run on the fields.  
And just in case the school colors start to seem irrelevant,  
and the school song is no longer a big deal.  
And just in case hegemonic America makes you feel  
like the lives you've changed are miniscule,  
and the work you can do is a thing of the past.  
And just in case outsiders makes you feel like  
your best achievements are meaningless,  
and you should pack up and go back...  
just know that you made one Black girl believe,  
she had the power to alter her condition.  
You gave her permission to be-  
Better.  
Bolder.  
Prouder.  
Louder.  
More than she ever thought she could be.  
You gave her the keys she needed to be free.  
It wasn't a fluke.  
It wasn't by chance.  
It wasn't luck.  
You took this big-eyed, Black girl by the hand,  
conquered her fears,

breathed life into her abilities  
and showed her that her voice was worthy.  
You showed her that the world deserved to hear her story.  
Despite a history of combating less than conditions and expectations,  
you birthed a  
Better-than,  
Bright-eyed,  
Proud Black girl,  
who because of you believes she can fly.  
Developing students likes these,  
HBCUs need to survive.  
You've proved that concrete roses<sup>1</sup> can still thrive.  
To the HBCUs that once were and still are:  
Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "concrete roses" refers to a poem by Tupac Shakur. In his book "The Rose that Grew From Concrete" he spoke of a rose that didn't receive the adequate sunlight, potting, rain or attention and yet it grew to do great things.

I Wouldn't Have Passed the Brown Paper Bag Test

I wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.

I am the darkest of my sisters.

Deep brown knowing,

No ivory having,

Hair just a tad too nappy,

Don't- run- around- town –too- happy-

because- we- can't- see –you- after- dark.

Dark.

I wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.

You know, the test Black people had to take back in the day

where they placed a brown paper bag next to your face

and that determined if we're good enough.

If you're light enough.

If your skin is bright enough.

I would've failed with flying colors.

I wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.

I'd like to blame my mother.

She has a smooth Hershey milk chocolate tone,

no caramel in between.

So dark she has to smile

to avoid appearing mean.

Nothing to leave to the imagination.

Dark.

She's beautiful.

She wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.

I wouldn't have passed the brown paper bad test.

I told my friend I got into Rollins.  
She was more than surprised that they accepted one of my kind.  
Amid the school's slab of ivory,  
I would be the lump of coal never to reveal a diamond.  
She said there must've been a quota for them to fill,  
because that is the only reason why they would allow my kind in.  
Because apparently my GPA doesn't matter as much as my Snicker toned skin.  
Maybe she was right because stepping foot on this campus doesn't feel right.  
All I see are "light brights" and girls with real hair flowing down their backs.  
No matter how long I straighten mine it will never look like that.  
So for the most part, I keep to myself and search for people like me.  
You know, the thick-hair-having  
wear-light-clothes-to-make-you-look-happy,  
pretty -"for a Black girl" -type of brown.  
Dark.  
I wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.  
Even though I stick out like a White person at the Million Man March,  
I am hard to see.  
Even when I know the answers, I don't offer them.  
Even when I do the work, I am the last to turn it in.  
That's the thing about my kin and my kind.  
We want to be alike but different at the same time.  
We want validation for going to schools  
where there are only a few on campus who look like me,  
But in the same breath proclaim we represent a different type of minority.  
You know, the type beyond the status quo.  
The type of Black woman who lets her natural afro flow  
and ties it up in an African head scarf at night,

because she doesn't care that in the day she is surrounded by "light brights."

Yea right!

The type of minority that went to an HBCU

to embrace her culture and unleash her pride.

But applied to a mostly White school

because of their graduate program.

We all know prestige trumps

pride every damn time and every damn day of the week.

Even Soul-food Sunday.

I wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.

The girl attends that white school, but wears her Florida A&M hoodie

on campus every chance she gets.

Even on days when it doesn't rain.

And regardless of where she goes in the world,

she never misses a Homecoming game.

She misses Florida A&M when she is away

but knows that her education equipped her

to deal with the pressures of being an onyx stone thrown against a white wall.

So she walks with a confidence mistaken for arrogance.

In the stature of Zora Neale Hurston, she stands tall.

You know, the Martin Luther King Jr. parade participant going,

Black Panther fist throwing,

Marcus Garvey quoting,

Ok with being Black,

but secretly wondering- what- it's- like- not- to be- type of Black.

Dark.

The type of dark that wouldn't have passed the brown paper bag test.

## The Search for Me

I didn't know what it felt like to see me.

And that is why I went to an HBCU.

That's it.

And, no, I am not talking about the *me* I grew up seeing sporadically on TV.

Not the *me* on *Martin* or on *In Living Color*.

Not the *me* known for repping some squad or color.

I wanted to see shades of me that only resided in my dreams.

Not the *me* that was being portrayed on the news or the *me* shaking her ass in the music videos.

Not the *me* content with standing on the corner.

I was desperate to see the *me* who needed more.

I wanted to see what the *me* could be in a place away from the manipulation of fast money and drugs.

Contrary to what sceptics of my world believe, I didn't go to an HBCU because it was easier to get into.

It wasn't a second choice for me.

I went almost 19 years in the world without seeing *me*!

I don't know if anyone who has the privilege of seeing themselves understands what it is like...

to be outside of your skin while still in.

Desperately trying to be heard but no one listens-

Instead, everyone looks at you like you're a sin...or a joke.

No one understands that all you want to do is grow,

but at every turn you feel stifled when the Black kids call you "too White"

because you strive for an education.

And the White kids think you are a rarity,

your existence alone is a special occasion.

They all stare at you but never into you, afraid of what they might see.

Black and white both kept trying to define me.

In class I would sit at my desk with agitated hands and bent knees,  
knowing the answers but denying myself the right to raise my hand.  
I didn't know who I was, but I knew enough to understand—  
that I didn't want to feel suffocated in a world where I should have access to air.  
I just wanted a place where I wouldn't be questioned about my intellect  
or ridiculed about my hair.  
I didn't know anything about the sacred history of Black people carving a niche,  
Making progress inch by inch.  
I didn't know anything about my ancestors scraping pennies  
to create a place where  
they can learn to read and write without fear of being lynched.  
I didn't know anything about W.E.B Dubois, Booker T. Washington, or Mary McLeod  
Bethune.  
I didn't know anything about four beautiful brown girls  
dead from a bombing at  
their church Sunday School.  
All I knew was that my spirit yearned for a place to dwell.  
It deserved no judgement for desiring more.  
My mind was restless, defeated,  
my body tired and sore.  
All I knew was that if I didn't find a place where my entire entity could thrive,  
the tiny part of me that believed in my existence would die.  
My potential would fester and mildew without the nutrients to grow.  
I would've been starving for a purpose, eager for an ambition I was never shown.  
The search for me was not about vanity or magically reversing the rights to wrongs.  
I needed to see reflections of me in a setting that felt like home.  
The world is not always welcoming to a brown girl like me.  
I am either over- or under -accepted.  
I just wanted a shelter where I could lay my head on a pillow and finally get some rest.

And not worry about it being crushed or stepped on by people whom I can clearly see  
never see me.

I wanted to see whom I could be in a place surrounded by images  
and individuals who relish my truth.

I was constantly told by my grandmother about a place so uplifting  
that one could immerse herself in others and see pieces of herself shine through.

I was searching for the *me* she already knew.

I didn't know that there were over 100 of these schools.

I didn't know their history.

I didn't know their founding fathers or mothers.

I didn't know anything about sororities.

I didn't comprehend the battles over funding and land.

All I knew was that from the moment I stepped foot on that Historical Black University  
it held my heart in its hands.

That was it.

I had finally found for whom I was searching...

beautiful,

colorful,

vibrant,

free-flowing,

unapologetic,

relentless reflections of me.



If I Had A Dime For Every LaQuasha...

She asked, “How come you left to go to a Black people school  
but you come back here talking like White people and shit?”

I laughed at her to myself.

I didn’t quite know how to respond to this.

What I wanted to do was ask her: “Why does my dialect concern you?”

But I didn’t.

I wanted to explain to her

that speaking in a different vernacular can alter your mind frame.

It can make you believe you can achieve things,

achieve more than walking to the store,

getting one of the men on the corner to buy you gizzards and fries for dinner.

I am talking about a world much bigger than welfare checks and petty connects.

I wanted to inspire her.

But I didn’t.

I wanted to scream!

Please believe that I am in no way looking down on you.

I understand how your conditions have trapped you.

But you find fault with me because

I choose to speak in a way that feels natural to me.

So what, that I enunciate my “r’s” and my “t’s”?

You believe that I have offended you instead of acknowledging the real enemy.

I am your sister.

Not bound by blood but by

the pigment of our skin.

Stereotypes of Black women should offend you so much more—

than me speaking in a higher register.

Your identity should not be shaken because

you see me carrying a bag of books.

What about my demeanor has you shook?

Meanwhile, popular conceptions of Black women

continue to be manipulated and contrived.

The media have our souls in their hands.

Teasing us as if we are the lions, they the masters,

dangling a juicy piece of steak.

*This* should be more than your heart can take.

You should be outraged!

The world shouldn't keep you silent

as you fight for better programs in your community

and effective ways to end the inner-city violence.

Yet you nitpick my speech-

instead of being outraged over the fact that

more inner-city Black girls value their bodily assets than their education.

You fixate on the fact that I have made more of my condition.

I decided to transcend the statistics

that have Black girls ranked highest to get HIV and AIDS

but among the lowest in achieving an education and breaking the cycle of poverty.

I wanted to educate her.

But I didn't.

All of my insides wanted to scream!

You choose to pinpoint me—for talking like “White people” as you call it?

So I guess you believe that I was the only one influenced by European culture.

I was the only one whose ancestors were brought here,

stripped of their families, identities and given a new names.

Yup, that was just MY great-great-great- grandma picking cotton all day,  
sun up to sun down in the field as a slave.

I am the only one who has the blood of slave ancestors running through my veins.

The only one with a European last name.

Nothing about you is dominant culture inspired.

Not your French manicured nails and  
certainly not your 16- inch blonde Malaysian weave.

Nope!

The embracing of European culture...that is strictly ME.

I wanted to be angry at her.

But I couldn't.

I wanted to say all of that and more.

However, I could tell by looking into her blue contacts  
that she wouldn't get it.

Toni Morrison could be screaming in one ear  
and Jamaica Kincaid shouting in another.

She wouldn't understand  
that her love affair with mediocrity is the reason my dialect offends her.

She couldn't understand that since she didn't love herself  
she could never comprehend why  
a Historically Black College or University should even exist.

Going over facts and opinions  
would sound like nonsense.

I wanted to change her mind.

I wanted to lead her to the switch so that she could turn on the lights.

I wanted to enlighten her about HBCUs so she could embrace what I was taught.

I wanted her to embrace the energy of her ancestors  
giving their last to educate students against unimaginable odds.

I wanted her know that even newly- freed slaves understood  
that education goes beyond reading and writing.

Education represents glaciers of possibilities.

I needed her to understand that her worth isn't measured by the size of her car  
Or by what the last man bought.

But I couldn't.

I just stared at her and walked away,  
replaying that meeting to myself four years after  
because of all the words I could not say.

### Pipe Dreams and Welfare Things

Her image will always be stuck in my head.  
 Fifteen years later, I have nightmares about all the things she said.  
 Her name was Ms. Fisher.  
 She was a little old lady, with pigeon piss colored hair-  
 covered by pink rollers, hidden by a large stocking cap.  
 She had two daughters and three granddaughters.  
 She lived in the center of the neighborhood.  
 Regardless of where I went, I couldn't escape her.  
 Her voice was gritty and harsh-  
 her tone assertive.

Every morning I walked to school holding my books I would hear her say;  
 "Those Black schools are the places the ugly girls go.  
 The girls who don't have much sense.  
 Because if they did, they'd get one of these men around here to pay their rent.  
 But they are so dumb, they don't know how to work the system."

Then she'd smile at me, with fried chicken hanging from her gums  
 and left over gizzards stuck in her teeth.  
 She was the first person who made 11-year-old me feel inadequate  
 for wanting to achieve.

She had never been out of Orange Center.  
 She never learned to drive.  
 She never finished high school.  
 Yet she knew enough to survive.  
 She knew enough to know that;  
 "FAMU ain't shipping out no cooking women.  
 And not one man wants a woman who don't know what to do with a pot.  
 All the edu-ma-cation in the world can't replace a woman  
 who knows how to hit man's spot.  
 that's why I let my kids know that  
 schoolbooks can't replace what you learn from the streets."  
 She'd be talking to the old ladies on the porch,  
 but staring directly at me.

See,

Her words festered in my mind.  
 Year after year and every single time  
 I thought about applying to an HBCU  
 I would hear her cackle and say,  
 "That little girl at 2054 Jacobs Place,  
 always running around here yelling I'm going to FAMU or BCC,  
 meanwhile if a man was starving she couldn't cook him one piece of meat.

Eleven years old and just spoiled as she want to be.  
Poor child! Can't cook herself nothing to eat!"

I saw Ms. Fisher in a nightmare I had two days ago-  
her body frail and brittle.

Open sores covered her.

Her crusted toe nails hung over her bedroom shoes,  
scraping the ground as she walked.

My eyes swelled with water.

I could hear her voice before she began to talk.

I stared at her dying eyes and told her that

my Alma Mata is the school she said I was dumb for wanting to get into.

Yes, I have a man, and yes, I actually learned how to cook decent food.

I told her I almost didn't apply

but the 11-year-old inside me had to die.

I killed her the day I got accepted into one of those  
"black schools for ugly girls."

That was the day I stopped hearing Ms. Fisher  
and I became the omniscient voice in my head.

She grimaced at me with clumps of chicken still stuck in her teeth,

I knew regardless of what I said she'd never listen to me.

I stopped talking, grabbed my degree, smiled and walked away.

I won.

Her opinion died with that little girl she tried to break.

### Love at First Mic

I fell in love the summer of 2004.

This boy started showing up at the coffee shop.

Every Thursday, he would take the stage and start off a poem by saying,

“My name is Marcus and I go to Howard University.

In my opinion it is the best HBCU in the world.

I am going to change the world with my words.”

From then on, he had my mind gone.

I could listen to him recite poetry to me all night long.

With dark blue jeans,

he wore a Howard University sweatshirt or a Bob Marley necklace.

When really feeling what he was speaking, he wore both.

The light on stage was dim but his face illuminated through it.

From the moment I saw him I was ready to commit;

to his ideas, his goals, his ambitions and his visions.

Words flowed from his mouth, effortlessly and effectively.

He was a man on a mission.

I would focus my eyes on his, barely blinking,

desperately craving his attention.

He would speak about how the emancipation of Black people

lead to the education of all people

in a lesson on the tenacity of the rose that grows through concrete.

He told us to remember that coal transformed to diamonds

because it persevered, amidst years of pressure-

and that education for Black people was worth protecting.

His voice was deep and full.

He spoke with the passion of 2Pac.

He had the assertiveness of knowledge from the streets.

He said that Black Panthers were on to something  
when they wanted to open more schools for Black people.  
Because for centuries we had been the only ones trying to save our souls.  
He said we were the chosen ones; our story deserved to be told.  
He wouldn't rest until his people were free from the slavery of their minds.  
So he was on a world-changing tour,  
inspiring people one sentence at a time.  
I hanged on every word.  
If he told me to jump,  
I'd grab a po-go stick and ask, "How high?"  
But he wasn't into tricks.  
His words he wanted us to live by.  
He would go on and on  
about how the assertiveness of Mary McLeod Bethune could lie inside someone in the crowd.  
And how with just a vision and a dime we could start our own school.  
He spoke about the protests he led at Howard  
to promote equal rights.  
He stressed how important women were in the struggle.  
He said that women made the strength of a man  
because they were the spirit in a man's hustle.  
The louder he spoke, the more his hands moved.  
The entire coffee shop rose to his compelling attitude.  
He exuded confidence.  
I admired his intelligence.  
He said the struggle for education may seem invisible but if that were true,  
then how come most schools in the urban community are graded C and below schools,  
while those in the suburbs ride high on A's and B's year after year?  
Although segregation is illegal, the writing on the wall is plain and clear.



He said it is hypocrisy at its finest, making the blind believe they can see.

But he wasn't naïve.

He demanded a reconstruction of the education system  
piece by piece.

One Thursday night I showed up wearing a borrowed Howard..

He shouted me out as the girl with the matching school spirit.

In my mind I'd found my kindred spirit.

His words were intoxicating.

*This is your time. Show it in your stride.*

*Make Africa proud. Show it your speech.*

*Educate yourself. Transform your mind.*

He spoke as an old soul,

as if he were before his time.

Like he was supposed to be walking on the Edmund Pettus Bridge  
next to Martin Luther King.

Or like he was in the room with W.E.B. DuBois

Helping him pen his philosophy.

Or like he was the fly on the podium

when Sojourner Truth gave her "Ain't I a Woman?" speech.

He spoke as if he lived through all of that just to be right there  
blessing the mic in front of me.

I would go home and dream I was his Nefertiti.

He was Pharaoh Akhenaten standing by my side.

His voice electrified me.

His mission inspired me.

His beauty made me feel alive.

He believed that fighting to remedy injustices was what he was born to do.

His words were cocky yet methodical.

Everything he spoke was truth.  
I fell in love with his lips every time he graced the stage.  
When summer ended I wallowed  
because when Thursday came he was gone away.  
He was nowhere around.  
I knew I'd never hear his voice.  
I'd never follow his hands.  
I'd never see his face again.  
Although he never knew my name,  
our bond was deeper than lovers and  
more sincere than friends.  
It was as if someone had come inside my body,  
with his bare hands and tore my heart away.  
I don't remember speaking any words to anyone for days.  
But that fall...  
I volunteered at an at-risk-middle school.  
I started mentoring disadvantaged youth.  
I started a documentary about the pressures of being Black in America.  
I started to find my own truth.  
I started believing my words and actions could inspire.  
I started running without the need or a signal for a fire.  
Because I was that fire that wanted to enhance the African American condition.  
I wanted to be a voice to speak on the African American experience.  
I became motivated to stand in front of the mic.  
I became the person illuminated by the dim light.  
That next summer when I returned home,  
I became the person on stage with the HBCU sweatshirt on,  
inspiring the audience, "Come Hither" to my truth.

I became the person the truth flowed through.

Every Thursday, I would take the stage and start off my poem by saying,

“My name is Monae.

I go to Florida A&M University.

In my opinion it’s the best HBCU in the world.

And I am going to change the world with my words.”

## HISTORICAL BLACK MOTHERS AND GRANDMOTHERS

My mother never finished college.

She started at a nearby community school but at the time she'd rather party  
and didn't care too much about being labeled a "smarty",  
so she dropped out before I was even a thought.

Maybe that's why I always thought I was an after- thought,  
A comma.

A subject added after an incomplete thought.

When I was younger, I wondered sometimes if she'd notice that I was missing.  
Not in presence-

but in mind I wasn't really there all the time.

I was fighting any part of me that resembled her.

Still no mirror could deny I looked just like her.

So my head was always in a book, trying to escape my fate.

I didn't have the means but I must've kept my wants on display,  
because years later she told me that at night she prayed-  
that her baby girl would get into an HBCU one day.

I didn't even know she knew where I wanted to go.

When I graduated her smile outshined mine.

Since then she's told me that I am everything she was supposed to be.

And I know she loves me but I wonder what she could've achieved  
if she would've chosen a different route and finished that degree.

My grandmother never went to college.

She met a boy and had my mother at sixteen.

Forget aspiring for a degree.

She was just trying to get a diploma.

But no one could loan her any money  
so she dropped out and got a job to raise my mother and my auntie.

When my mother was in high school,  
she used to walk my grandmother to night school  
so she could get her GED.

My grandmother still got up and went to work,  
helped with school work and made sure her family had three square meals a day.  
And she did it all over again, some 22 years later,  
when she took me in to raise.

I am grateful for her hustle,  
but I wonder how much less of a struggle  
it would've been for her if she hadn't met that boy,  
stayed in school and went to an HBCU.

I wonder if she would've been the next Famous Amos,  
because she loved to bake for me.

What if she would've made a different choice that night my mom was conceived?  
Would she, instead, have gotten her degree?

My great-grandmother didn't go to college.

All the schools were segregated when she was my age.

She used to work in a diner, but had to go through the back door just to get paid.

And no, she wasn't a slave but her mother was.

Sometimes I stare into my great-grandmother's eyes  
and I wonder if she even knew how strong she was back then.

She was still a child herself and raised 3 kids,  
with just a diploma and her two hands.

She tells me all the time that her life was always in God hands,

But I often wonder how different my great-grandmother's life would be  
if she were able to escape the segregated south and get a culinary degree.

I don't feel worthy of the women who came before me.

They made a life for themselves despite their circumstances.

Because of the paths they've chosen, I have the privilege to achieve.  
I spent countless hours wondering who they could've been  
if they had chosen to chase my dreams.  
I spent so many days trying to figure out why they couldn't see what I could see.  
But I was blind to the fact that they are the reasons why I chose to attend an HBCU.  
I wanted to learn about other strong women.  
Women who embraced their truths,  
who knew I had the ability to grow because they did  
against unspeakable odds.  
I wanted to be taught by leaders  
who believed in a legacy so deeply they felt it was their mission to teach it.  
I wanted to be surrounded by people who resembled my mother's strong mind,  
my grandmother's strong will and my great- grandmother's strong spirit.  
I no longer wonder whom they could've been.  
Instead I acknowledge and embrace the principles, pride and persistence they instilled in me.  
I am humbled by the realization that without them there would be no me.  
They, like HBCUs, are relentless in their purpose to educate without fail.  
They, like HBCUs, were the foundation that blazed a new trail.  
They, like HBCUs, will forever be respected  
and I am still in awe  
of what they have done.  
I pray I acquire their wisdom and their worldly knowledge.  
My great-grandmother didn't go to college.  
My grandmother didn't go to college.  
My mother didn't finish college.  
But because of them, I did.

# Historical and Contextual Analysis

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Questioning Whether or Not HBCUs Are Necessary**

In 1967, Christopher Jenks and David Riesman published a controversial article entitled: “The American Negro College.”<sup>2</sup> According to Jenks and Riesman, students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) would be better off attending Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs). According to Jenks and Riesman, HBCUs are “ill-financed, ill-staffed, caricatures of white educational institutions.”<sup>3</sup> As such, Jenks and Riesman conclude that HBCUs are “academic disaster areas.”<sup>4</sup> In short, it seems that Jenks and Riesman took this position in response to the actions taken by HBCUs during the Civil Rights Movement. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, HBCUs had mostly stayed away from disturbing the racial climate of the time. Students at HBCUs became involved in the Civil Rights Movement by protesting for equal rights and participating in bus boycotts. In response the media began to question the quality of these institutions. Mary Gasman mentioned in her article, “Salvaging ‘Academic Disaster Areas’: The Black College Response to Christopher Jencks and David Riesman’s 1967 *Harvard Educational Review Article*”, - that during this time the “national newspaper articles focused on integration of White institutions and the financial state of Black colleges, but ignored the changes taking

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<sup>2</sup> Marybeth Gasman, “Salvaging “Academic Disaster Areas”: The Black College Response to Jencks and David Riesman’s 1967 Harvard Educational Review Article.” *The Journal of Higher Education*. 77:2 (2006) 317 Date Accessed October 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 322.



place on Black college campuses.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Jencks and Riesman’s article emphasized HBCUs weaknesses and did not acknowledge their strengths.

Of course, their accusations outraged the Black community. Gasman points out that “some exposed the unfairness of the comparisons made in the article, some questioned Jencks’ and Riesman’s methods and qualifications, some accused the authors of racial bias, and one drew attention to the struggles that Black colleges had faced and the value of protecting their future.”<sup>6</sup> Gasman argued that Jencks and Riesman didn’t conduct sufficient research to conclude that HBCUs were inadequate educational institutions. Gasman contended that “their acquisition of data was unsystematic and relied on impression and intuition far more than is typically required for a scholarly article.”<sup>7</sup>

Either way, the question came before the US Supreme Court in the case of *US v. Fordice*.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this case, several colleges had policies that perpetuated segregation. Ultimately the court ruled that the state of Mississippi had to remove all racial classifications of state institutions in an effort to promote racial equality and equal education amongst the colleges.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 317.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>8</sup> Roland G. Fryer, Michael Greenstone. “The Changing Consequences of Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 1 vol 2(2010) 117 Date Accessed: November 2014. <http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/app.2.1.116>.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Gasman, Valerie Lundy-Wagner, Tafaya Ransom, Nelson Bowman III. “Unearthing Promise and

Of course, the federal district court's ruling did not end the debate about whether or not HBCUs are necessary educational institutions. Quite the opposite; it only fueled the controversy on both sides. Those who are critical of HBCUs argue that the state ought to close all HBCUs. They therefore gather information in support of this claim. By contrast, those in support of HBCUs argue that the state ought to better fund, staff, and support them.<sup>10</sup> In support of this position, advocates argue that African American students at HBCUs continue to demonstrate high academic achievement.<sup>11</sup> As evidence for this claim Robert Palmer notes that research done by the United Negro College Fund illustrates "that of the top 10 colleges that graduate African Americans with PhDs or MDs, 9 are HBCUs."<sup>12</sup> These statistics prove that HBCUs are necessary because they are institutions where many African Americans still choose to receive their education. It is also noted by Palmer that "HBCUs account for 8 out of 10 African American graduates in mathematics and statistics."<sup>13</sup>

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Potential: Our Nations Black Colleges and Universities", *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 5 vol 35 (2010): 17, Date Accessed August 2014. Academic Search Premier.

<sup>10</sup> Harold H. Wenglinsky, "The Educational Justification of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Policy Response to the US Supreme Court", *American Educational Research Association* 18 vol 1 (1996) 92 Date Accessed: February 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1164232>.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara F. Tobolowsky, Charles L. Outcalt, Patricia M. McDonough. "The Role of HBCUs in the College Choice Process of African Americans in California" *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, vol 1 (2005) 63 Date Accessed: February 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40027231>.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Palmer, "The Perceived Elimination of Affirmative Action and the Strengthening of Historically Black Colleges and Universities" *Journal of Black Studies* vol 40, 4(2010): 764 Date Accessed: February 2015.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648540>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Of course, I take up this question approximately 200 years after the creation of the first Historically Black College. In what follows, I argue that, like all colleges and universities, HBCUs have some room for improvement, particularly in the area of funding. As I see it, HBCUs continue to provide comfortable environments that promote productivity. HBCUs are places where students are able to earn a degree in an inclusive and non-threatening setting. Despite their limited funding, HBCUs continue to provide a sound education to many students (regardless of their background or socioeconomic status), giving them an opportunity to contribute positively to America's economy. HBCUs are minority-serving institutions that benefit the masses. Education has the potential to help people alter their condition by giving them the tools they need to move beyond it. In the end, I will prove HBCUs are necessary by showing that they are important in the context of the life experiences of African Americans. I will briefly look into court cases as a way of delving into the question about whether or not HBCUs are necessary in order to show that they are not perceived as prestigious as TWIs. Lastly, I look at empirical and anecdotal research because I claim that the research shows America is not in a position to disregard HBCUs. With the negative racial climate that currently exists on college campuses there is a need for institutions that foster positivity, educate despite status, and prepare students to move beyond their condition—HBCUs provide that space.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **The Introduction of the African Experience in America**

African American history intertwines with American history and, in the midst of it all, is the history of HBCUs. It is important when we think of HBCUs that we understand and consider the context of the African American experience, particularly as it relates to American racism. The exact year the first slave was captured and taken to the American colonies is debatable, but by the early 1600s the trans-Atlantic slave trade was in full swing. The statistics of how many lives lost during the middle passage is uncertain but historians argued that it is significantly higher than what is documented. In his book *Ebony and Ivy*, Craig Wilder states that “deaths that occurred before ships departed Africa often went unrecorded, transatlantic mortality rates were high and the causes of death frequently unnoted, and merchants routinely underreported their human cargoes to avoid duties in the Americas.”<sup>14</sup> The Africans were humiliated and taken against their will. Wilder writes: “stripped nude to make them easier to wash down and secure, shackled in pairs, and often branded for identification, these prisoners spent long periods in rat-and insect-infested bowels in ships, interrupted only by a regimen of feedings, airings, and exercise under threat of whips, blades and guns.”<sup>15</sup> The middle passage was inhumane for the Africans who were subjected to severe dehydration and malnourishment and who were kept in cramped quarters. The treatments that were used to oppress the Africans, often contributed to fatalities.

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<sup>14</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivory: Race, Slavery and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 62.

Treatments such as purging and administering enemas were used to combat dehydration but they failed to give the Africans the energy they needed to survive the Middle Passage.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the next 250 years the American economy thrived from the system of slavery. The south benefited from the free manual labor and the north benefitted from trading of goods with the south. Although the south is often known for being brutal to enslaved Africans, the north was far from uninvolved. There were curfews for slaves and free Black people in Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.<sup>17</sup> In Boston, it was the law that free Black men were required to provide free labor, such as maintaining roads.<sup>18</sup> In addition to requiring freed Black men to work without receiving a profit, the government punished those who helped with the freeing of slaves, to limit the growth of the free Black population.<sup>19</sup> It was illegal for Black people to be free in the south, and being a free Black person in the north had its limitations. As Wilder explains, the “Puritans supplied the Carolinas and Virginia and brought the products of slave labor and other materials back to New England, where they built ships and launched new ventures.”<sup>20</sup> Every colony benefited from the exploitation and manipulation of Black people. There was simply no way for a person of color to have equal treatment to or respect from a White person.

Along with being given a new name and identity, slaves were taught by their masters the religion of Christianity. In some cases, slave masters were preachers. The slave masters,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 32.

knowing their servants could not read, used literacy laws against slaves. Slave owners often told slaves that God made them inferior and subjected them to their fate. The system of slavery depended on the slaves' docile behavior and submissive compliance. Slave masters would bid higher on slaves who were obedient and subservient. Simply put, educating slaves would undermine the system the American colonists worked so vigorously to build. Literacy promotes independent thinking. The south knew how detrimental literate slaves could be to their plantations. It was legal to punish a slave by chopping off fingers or hands if s/he learned to read or write.<sup>21</sup> There was no place for liberated minds on the cotton fields. Along with race, education became a great divider. Even with most slaves being illiterate, they were wise enough to understand that literacy was a tool that could lead them to freedom. Education was a classification that distinguished them the emancipated. Late author and civil-rights activist, John Howard Griffin said that "Black people prized education as the only doorway into the world of knowledge and dignity to which they aspired."<sup>22</sup>

The dichotomy (that was created amongst the races because of slavery) is important to comprehend because often the comparison between HBCUs and TWIs is made, suggesting that these two types of institutions had similar inceptions or that their inceptions have little relevance on their current prominence (or lack thereof). However this is not the case. The profits from the system of slavery provided TWIs with secure, stable and large college trusts.<sup>23</sup> Wilder contends that, "slaveholders became college presidents."<sup>24</sup> From their

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<sup>21</sup> John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me*. (New York: New American Library, 1962), 141.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>23</sup> Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy* page, 77.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 77.

inception most TWIs never had a problem receiving funds, determining curriculum or attracting students. Wilder notes that in fact, “the first five colleges in the British American colonies-Harvard (established 1636), William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), Codrington (1745) in Barbados, and New Jersey (1746)-were instruments of Christian expansionism, and major beneficiaries of the African slave trade and slavery.”<sup>25</sup>

Although it was illegal for Black people to be educated in the south, in the north a few HBCUs were established in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Reginald Wilson noted that “although the first college for African Americans was established before the Civil War-Chimney University in 1837-the overwhelming majority were established after 1865 in response to two concerns: the need to quickly establish institutions to educate newly freed slaves and the segregationist sentiments of southern educators who opposed integrating blacks into already-existing white schools and colleges.”<sup>26</sup> The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution ended slavery, but the responsibility of educating African Americans was shared between missionaries, philanthropists and the federal government. Collectively, they began taking on the task of educating four million former slaves, more than 90 percent of whom were illiterate.<sup>27</sup> Early Historically Black Colleges were colleges in name only and not in content of study. The focus was to teach the newly freed slaves how to read. In many cases, African Americans organized their own HBCUs by using the few literate leaders of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Reginald Wilson, “Can Black Colleges Solve the Problem of Access for Black Students”, *American Journal of Education* 1990, 4 vol 98, 443 Date Accessed February 2015 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085326>.

<sup>27</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman III. “Unearthing Promise and Potential”, 73.

community to educate newly- freed slaves.<sup>28</sup> HBCUs were the few set of intuitions where Black people were able to learn how to read and write, so they became staples in the Black communities. Together, HBCUs and churches began establishing Black communities through literacy and religion.

The lack of missionaries in the south led to HBCUs being established to mainly train teachers.<sup>29</sup> Mary Gasman, Valerie Lundy-Wagner, Tafaya Ransom, and Nelson Bowman III note that “as early as 1865, the Freedman’s Bureau began establishing HBCUs, resulting in mainly male staff and teachers with military backgrounds.”<sup>30</sup> White northern missionary societies established HBCUs in southern states such as Louisiana and Georgia.<sup>31</sup> Missionaries and churches also established HBCUs for religious education and training. Often White missionaries who founded HBCUs did so with selfish and malicious intent. The goal of these schools was to teach former slaves how to be “upstanding” Christians. Although slavery had ended, America had not yet embraced the concept of religious freedom especially for the 4 million newly- freed black people. Thus, the interest in these schools was in making sure African Americans remained in-line through Christianity. Gasman, Lundy - Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman affirm that “the church’s missions in establishing these

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<sup>28</sup> Walter R. Allen, Joseph O. Jewell, Kimberly A. Griffin and De’Sha Wolf “Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Honoring the Past, Engaging the Present, Touching the Future” *Journal of Negro Education* 76 no3 (2007): 267 accessed February 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Reginald, Wilson “Can Black Colleges Solve the Problem of Access for Black Students?” *American Journal of Education* 98 no 4 (1990), 444, accessed February 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman “Unearthing Promise and Potential”, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



colleges were to ensure that African Americans conformed to America's specific brand of Christianity and to rid the country of the threat of uneducated African Americans."<sup>32</sup> Many of these schools dismissed individual thought and focused on Christian principles taught by their White educators. The HBCUs started by Black church denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church also focused on Christian principles but they had the leniency to teach subjects they thought would benefit African Americans, such as African history. The problem with education that solely focuses on religion is that it limits the individual of a well-rounded educational experience. It eliminates the specific parts of an education that contributes to student's growth. An education that places a high emphasis on religion but none on history, agriculture, industry or literature puts the individual at a competitive disadvantage upon completion his or her degree.

Among the colleges established by Black churches are Morris Brown College in Atlanta and Allen University in South Carolina.<sup>33</sup> The Black church denominations had the freedom to teach the curricula of their choice, but because they were less financially stable, these HBCU's lacked consistent funding. Eventually many of the private colleges started by Black missionaries, such as Allen University, thrived in educating students but the state failed to produce adequate funding for them. Although Allen University is still one of the oldest established HBCUs it has never recovered from its difficult financial start and has therefore struggled to maintain its accreditation. Morris Brown also has had accreditation issues due to the lack of consistent funding. The institution filed for bankruptcy in 2012 with

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid 6 per (Anderson, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 6.

the intention to rebuilding the school.<sup>34</sup> The schools funded by White missionaries didn't benefit the true needs of their students. What the students needed was an education that fostered skills that promoted economic ambition and education with an emphasis on a history that acknowledged their past, so that they could better understand their condition. Missing out on an education that develops the mind negatively affected black students. The institutions established by Black missionaries although they tried, fell short of helping students reach their educational potential because of their lack of funding. However, in the south more institutions for Black people continued to be built.

The federal government continued to show interest in African American education with the second Morrill Act in 1890.<sup>35</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman stated "this act stipulated that states practicing segregation in their public colleges and universities would forfeit federal funding unless they established agricultural and mechanical institutions for the black population."<sup>36</sup> Seventeen colleges were established because of the Morrill Act.<sup>37</sup> Land grant institutions among those were: Alabama A&M University, Alcorn State University, Delaware State University, Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Kentucky State University, Langston University, North Carolina A&T University, Prairie View A&M University, South Carolina State University, Southern University and A&M, Tennessee State University, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, University of Maryland (Eastern Shore), Virginia State University and West Virginia State

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson. "Can Black Colleges Solve the Problem?", 448.

<sup>35</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman, *"Unearthing Promise and Potential"*: 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 5, (Gasman, 2007a; Thompson, 1973).

College.<sup>38</sup> The law mentioned that money would be given equally to all institutions; however, the Black colleges received considerably less funding than the White colleges, and this limited their ability to offer course and build adequate facilities.<sup>39</sup> Wilson notes that “despite being established by the federal government, the 1890 schools were systematically underfunded by both federal and state sources.”<sup>40</sup> The Morrill Act of 1862 is also referred to as the Land Grant College Act.<sup>41</sup> M. Christopher Brown II mentions that the point of the Land Grant College Act was to assist in crop production. Brown says that “the [Land Grant College Act] provided federal support for state education, specifically in areas of agriculture and military service while the Morrill Act of 1890 authorized that funds be given to institutions that enrolled Black students.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the second Morrill Act, the General Education Board contributed to the advancement of HBCUs. The board gave over 60 million dollars to Black education.<sup>43</sup> This amount of funding was substantial in comparison to what other groups were contributing. Nevertheless, the General Education Board gave substantially more money to TWI's. In

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid,63.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson. “Can Black Colleges Solve the Problem?”, 446

<sup>41</sup> M. Christopher Brown II, “The Declining Significance of Historically Black College and Universities: Relevance, Reputation, and Reality in Obamerica” *The Journal of Negro Education* 82 no. 1, (2012): 8 accessed November 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman, “Unearthing Potential”, 79.

addition, while the General Education Board did support Black institutions, they were careful not to alter the status quo of racism in the mist of the Jim Crow era.<sup>44</sup>

A college education allowed African Americans to comprehend the world in new unparalleled ways. Education became a means of liberation.<sup>45</sup> With the literacy rate at an all-time high for Black students, schools were able to prepare them to compete in the working class with trade skills and later liberal studies. Walter R. Allen, Joseph O. Jewell, Kimberly A. Griffin and De'Sha S. Wolf, authors of "Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Honoring the Past, Engaging the Present, Touching the Future" note that "for Black [students], the debate over liberal education (championed by W.E.B. Du Bois) versus vocational education (advocated by Booker T. Washington) signified different ways of being in the world that Jim Crow racism had built: one accommodation, the other defiance."<sup>46</sup> From the very beginning there have been an extreme racialized disparities in wealth and education. Those disparities are now engrained in our politics and our education system. The next chapter will explain how the education deficit continued to affect HBCUs. As more African Americans became literate, there was a need to direct their abilities, either to a vocational preference or a general education. Although these educational philosophies differ, both spoke to the importance of educating and uplifting the African American community.

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, "The Declining Significance", 7.

<sup>45</sup> Travis J. Albritton, "Educating Our Own: The Historical Legacy of HBCUs and Their Relevance for Educating a New Generation of Leaders", *Urban Review*, vol 44 (2012): 312, Date Accessed December 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Walter R. Allen, Joseph O. Jewell, Kimberly A. Griffin, De'Sha S. Wolf, "Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Honoring the Past, Engaging the Present, Touching the Future", *The Journal of Negro Education* 76 No. 3 (2007): 266, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034570>.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **The Curriculum Shift at HBCUs**

The ideologies of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois further explain how education has been disproportionally distributed. While they both were proponents for African American achievement, their methods of overcoming oppression were different. Washington contended that faster economic growth could be achieved through learning a trade or skill, while Du Bois argued for a liberal arts education. Washington's methods were arguably able to produce workers to help African Americans succeed economically; however, Du Bois' philosophy had the potential to lead to economic growth as well as intellectual growth for African Americans. Du Bois' desire to equip African Americans with a well-rounded education makes his philosophy the preferred of the two.

No two men's educational ideologies are debated, studied or admired more than Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois and with good reason. Washington and Du Bois both believed that in order for African Americans to rise above their conditions and exist in the middle class they needed to be educated. Their varying ideologies placed them on opposing sides of White people at the height of the Jim Crow era. Their different approaches brought much praise and criticisms from White and Black people alike, but both men were successful in creating lasting philosophies of African American higher education.

Marybeth Gasman and Tyler McMickens affirm that "in the early part of the twentieth century, Booker T. Washington was the most influential and celebrated African American in the United States."<sup>47</sup> In matters pertaining to the condition of Black people,

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Marybeth, Gasman. Tyler L. McMickens. "Liberal or Professional Education?: The Missions of

Washington's advisement was sought by White people of notability, influence and authority<sup>48</sup>. Frederick Dunn notes that "Washington counseled state and federal government officials, superintendents of school in both the north and the south, and at least two U.S. presidents."<sup>49</sup> Washington was a Hampton Institute alumnus who argued that technical skills would get African Americans the respect they wanted without the chaos that militant force would cause. Washington, son of an unidentified White slave owner, argued that African Americans should focus their energy on learning skills that were needed in the workforce because practical skills would lead to faster self-reliance. Washington's ideals were put into practice when he founded Tuskegee University. Washington wasn't brash in his approach but he didn't have to be. It didn't offend White people and it didn't intimate the racial structure at the time. Dunn says that Washington chose vocational education because "he believed the African American educational experience required a hard-headed, commonsense

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Public Black Colleges and Universities and Their Impact on the Future of African Americans", *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* 12, no 3. (2010): 288, accessed September 25, 2014 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2010.499800>. Gasman and McMickens quoted it from Michael, Bieze . *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self-Representation*. 2008. Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick, Dunn. "The Educational Philosophies of Washington, DuBois, and Houston: Laying the Foundation for Afrocentricism and Multiculturalism" *The Journal of Negro Education* 62, no 1 (1993): 26, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2295397>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 27. The author sourced it from L.R., Harlan. *The Booker T. Washington papers Vol 1&2*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

approach.”<sup>50</sup> African Americans seeking a vocational education was easier for White people to agree with because it focused more on Black people using their hands instead of their minds. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf contend that “white people overall tended to be more supportive of a vocational rather than a liberal arts curriculum, believing that, in addition to being too challenging for Black students, a liberal arts education would lead to dissatisfaction with the lower positions in society African Americans were forced to occupy.”<sup>51</sup> Based on his approach, one can conclude that Washington believed that the most effective way to educate a large group of people who were underrepresented is through agricultural and industrial/vocational training and development. Dunn outlines the reasons Washington advocated for vocational education:

“(1) because he thought it was a wave of the future; (2) because he was a product of it at Hampton Institute, and he had internalized that experience (3) because he strongly felt that African Americans could best develop strong economic base through the acquisition of utilitarian skills; and (4) because he deeply believed a vocational education was all that the larger, White-dominated society would allow.”<sup>52</sup>

The Black proponents of Washington found his proposal agreeable because it was practical. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf mention that while vocational education may be practical, it can also be limiting. The authors note that “Black students at many vocational and general education schools, engaged in a curriculum of moral instruction, elementary academics, manual labor, and social discipline that was not only supposed to teach their role in society, but also enable them to educate Black youth about their appropriate societal

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<sup>50</sup> Dunn, “The Educational Philosophies of Washington”, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 267, Allen & Jewell, 2002; Anderson, 1998; Ballard, 1973; Du Bois, 1903/1989.

<sup>52</sup> Dunn, “The Educational Philosophies of Washington”, 27.

roles.”<sup>53</sup> One could argue that it made sense for African Americans to put their time, effort and money into an education that would justify its means; industrial education did that. Although Washington is praised for his educational philosophy, Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf say critics of his educational approach believe “that the thrust of his program was to produce African American domestics and farmers who were polite and submissive in the face of what was frequently dehumanizing treatment for White [people].”<sup>54</sup>

Washington did revise his teaching philosophy a decade after he founded the Tuskegee Institute. He altered his position, developing a curriculum that combined the two disciplines—“practical and liberal arts.”<sup>55</sup> However, Dunn claims this wasn’t enough to alter the opinions of Washington’s critics. He says that “[Washington’s] change in position or curriculum didn’t pacify critics who believed that his philosophy of limiting African American education to manual training catered to the needs of Black [peoples’] former oppressors.”<sup>56</sup> Many of Washington’s critics believe he failed to understand how imperative his role was in being able to change the socioeconomic status of Black people. They argue that while Washington had the ability, through his notoriety and popularity, to shift the labor

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<sup>53</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 267.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Gasman, McMickens. “Liberal or Professional Education?” 289, accessed September 25, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Dunn. “The Educational Philosophies of Washington” 28.



markets in the wake of the Industrial Age, by providing Tuskegee students a more general education, he failed.<sup>57</sup>

W.E.B. Du Bois argued that African American education should be rooted in a history that could help their identities and histories. Dunn mentions that the biggest difference between Washington and Du Bois is that “Du Bois felt that the enslavement of Africans stripped them of their identity and thus he was driven by a need to reconcile the dualism inherent in the African American experience and identity.”<sup>58</sup> Du Bois studied history at Harvard and was the first African American to receive a PhD. Du Bois argued that self-discovery was essential for African Americans. He believed African American education should be primarily focused on identity aspects such as African history, ancestry and religion. Reiland Rabaka argues that Du Bois wanted the education for Black people to stimulate their growth in society and politics. Rabaka says that “Du Bois admonished Africana educators and educational institutions to use continental and diaspora African history and culture as their foundation and grounding point for departure.”<sup>59</sup> Du Bois argued that African Americans educational focus should be on liberal arts. Gasman and McMickens agree with scholar E.P. Davis that a liberal arts education should seek to reach these goals:

“contribute to the welfare of humanity in the conversation of the benefits of the past and in the enrichment of the present and future. It should furnish criteria for the judgment of the values. It should furnish background for a catholic interpretation of

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Reiland, Rabaka. “W.E.B. Du Bois’s Evolving Africana Philosophy of Education” *Journal of Black Studies*

human and social problems. It should prepare for adequate living. It should not apologize for these aims.”<sup>60</sup>

Du Bois wanted African Americans to realize that their culture existed before slavery.

Whereas critics argued that Washington settled for segregation, Dunn argues that “Du Bois urged African Americans to develop their own distinct and “superior” culture within the context of the American social system while simultaneously fighting to eliminate ‘the color line’ - the social, political, economic, and legal barrier of racial segregation.”<sup>61</sup> Their contrasting ideologies might lead one to believe that Du Bois completely omitted Washington’s methods but this is not so. In fact, Travis Albritton noted in his article, “Educating Our Own: The Historical Legacy of HBCUs and Their Relevance for Educating a New Generation of Leaders”, -that “Du Bois conceded the benefits of industrial education and he intended to bestow greater emphasis on the need for blacks to be trained in such areas as philosophy and science.”<sup>62</sup> Du Bois argued that the skills learned through a liberal arts education would prepare African Americans to be a race that demanded equal rights because their ethnicity demanded it therefore no amount of industrial work should have to be done in order for them to have to prove it. Du Bois argued that in order for Black people to be successful they needed to have an appreciation and knowledge of where they came from beyond slavery, so that they could comprehend the repercussions that slavery had on them.

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<sup>60</sup> Gasman, McMickens, “Liberal or Professional Education?” 290, accessed September 25, 2014, which

This article cites this quote from E.P. Davis, “The Negro Liberal Arts College,” *Journal of Negro Education* 2, no 3 (July 1933): 299-311, 299.

<sup>61</sup> Dunn, “The Educational Philosophies of Washington”, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Travis, Albritton. “Education Our Own: The Historical Legacy of HBCUs and Their Relevance for Educating a New Generation of Leaders”, *Education Leadership and Cultural Department*. No 44 (2012): 319.

Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf offer a breakdown of what a liberal arts schedule resembled; “for example, a classical curriculum would include the works of Rousseau and study of the French Revolution, which was perceived as having the potential to lead blacks to question their own oppression and create discontent.”<sup>63</sup>

There was no room for docility in Du Bois ideals. Albritton attests that “Du Bois philosophical ideas, although criticized for being an elitist, demanded that Black people receive an education that would enable them to oppose segregation and mount a direct discontent challenge to the Jim Crow politics of the day.”<sup>64</sup> Du Bois contended that Black schools had a responsibility to build a class of intellectual elites with a promise to uplift the race.<sup>65</sup> The core concept of Du Bois’s philosophy of African American education was his idea of the “Talented Tenth.”<sup>66</sup> Dunn explains: “African Americans who had attended the best colleges and universities had the responsibility of bringing the rest of the black community out of economic, political and social bondage.”<sup>67</sup> Whereas Washington’s theory involved African Americans working from the bottom up to prove their worth, Du Bois theory involved African Americans placing themselves at the top and pulling others up with them.

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<sup>63</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 267.

<sup>64</sup> Albritton. “Education Our Own”, 319.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn. “The Educational Philosophies of Washington”, 28.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 29.

The effect of both Washington's and Du Bois' educational theories is showing at today's HBCUs. Hampton, Tuskegee, Texas Southern and Bluefield State College focuses on professional and industrial education, while Spelman, Morehouse, Howard and Fisk focus more on the liberal arts and African and African-American history <sup>68</sup>. Dunn further explains the necessity of Du Bois educational philosophy, "DuBois, believed, like Washington, that education for the masses of African Americans must be related to their daily and social realities, he stressed the importance of the liberal arts and sciences and viewed these academic areas as the critical focus of African American education."<sup>69</sup> Du Bois fought for the importance of liberal education because it stretches far beyond learning a skillset for the present. As Dunn explains, "a people whose education led them to aspire to and achieve high levels of intellectual and conceptual competence, Du Bois contended, could never be enslaved again."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Gasman, McMickens, "Liberal or Professional Education?" 287.

<sup>69</sup> Dunn. "The Educational Philosophies of Washington", 29.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Important Cases in HBCU History**

As more HBCUs were established the General Education Board reduced their funding and chose to place their support elsewhere. In 1944, The United Negro College Fund was created in an effort to fulfill the financial gap left by the Board.<sup>71</sup> A decade later the desegregation law ordered in *Brown v. Board of Education*. This appeared advance the educational climate for racial minorities.

*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)* is one the most well-known cases in American history. Michael Birzer and Richard Ellis explain the significance of the case; “the U.S. Supreme Court ended federally sanctioned racial segregation in public schools by ruling unanimously that ‘separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.’”<sup>72</sup> The Supreme Court ruling left the impression that discrimination in education would no longer be acceptable. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf explain that the case “was actually a compilation of five different court cases challenging the constitutionality of segregation in public schools.”<sup>73</sup> Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, Black students were forced to attend schools with less financial support and resources, and this stunted their educational

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<sup>71</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman, “Unearthing Potential”, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Birzer. Richard Ellis. “Debunking the Myth That All Is Well in the Home of “Brown v. Topeka Board of Education”: A Study of Perceived Discrimination *Journal of Black Studies* 36, 6 (2006): 793 accessed April 11, 2015. <http://www.jstog.org/ezproxy.rollins.edu:2048/stable/40034347>.

<sup>73</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 264.

development and self-esteem.<sup>74</sup> The *Brown* decision affected students who attended public schools and it opened doors to African Americans in higher education. Prior to the *Brown* decision, African American students only had the option of attending HBCUs. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf recall that “in addition to increases in college enrollment, there was a district shift post- *Brown* as to where Black students attended college.”<sup>75</sup> Many believe that the *Brown* decision increased Black students access to TWIs, making HBCUs unnecessary. However, Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf argue that “HBCUs are still crucial in providing a consistently important educational pathway for Black students and a touchstone for the Black community.”<sup>76</sup>

It was perceived that the *Brown v. Board of Education* case moved America one step forward in race relations and educational equity. However, cases like *Sanders v Ellington*, proved that work still needed to be done on an institutional level. This case shows that more efforts needed to be made. *Sanders v Ellington* was filed against the state and local governments.<sup>77</sup> Sanders was a law student and part-time employee at the University of Tennessee (UT-Nashville).<sup>78</sup> Sanders claims that UT-Nashville infringed on the right of Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University (TAISU) , a four-year HBCU, to attract prospective students by changing from a two-year to a four-year university. UT-Nashville’s expansion had the potential to decrease TAISUs enrollment because the schools

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 265.

<sup>77</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman “Unearthing Promise and Potential”, 15.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

were less than four miles apart. Sanders argued that the expansion of the TWI, encroached on the ability of the HBCU to desegregate. While the *Brown* ruling mandated desegregation, it made it harder for HBCUs to attract non-minority students because of their limited resources. In other words, since TWIs are larger and have more funding, students perceive them as being better schools, overlooking HBCUs. This is wrong because it overshadows HBCUs by attracting students with a façade and not giving HBCUs a leveled field to educate. Changing the TWI from a part-time night school, to a full-time university would undermine enrollment at the HBCU, because TWI would attract more students. TAISU didn't have the same financial resources as UT-Nashville, which limited its ability to recruit non-minority students. It is important to note that even prior to the desegregation laws HBCUs never barred White students from attending. White students were not attracted to HBCUs because of racial prejudices and because HBCUs had limited resources and less developed facilities. Sanders Grier was able to prove that the expansion of UT-Nashville would affect enrollment at the HBCU, and, as a result, the U.S. Department of Justice prohibited the expansion.<sup>79</sup>

Additionally, the court ordered that a desegregation plan be developed for institutions of higher learning in Tennessee. The plan was created but never followed by concrete action from the court. This was a major blow to the HBCUs because it proved that despite the *Brown* decision, courts still felt that when it came to higher education, African Americans were inferior. To intensify matters, a judge ordered that TAISU (which had changed its name to TSU) had to diversify by increasing White enrollment in order to ensure that their school wasn't inferior to the TWIs.<sup>80</sup> The problem with this ruling wasn't the requirement to

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

increase White student enrollment, but that TSU didn't have the resources to attract the students in the first place. Members of the TSU community felt this ruling was unfair.

Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom and Bowman, note that "the students and faculty of TSU and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund argued that too much emphasis was placed on ridding TSU of its historical albeit racial history and too little on Tennessee's historically white institutions."<sup>81</sup> Understanding this case is important because it shows the engrained disparity and demonstrates that courts often fail to do enough to defend HBCUs.

This incident eventually led to Tennessee State University being formed in 1983.<sup>82</sup> It was the first time in history that a majority campus was dissolved into a historically black institution.<sup>83</sup> The dissolve of the two institutions didn't stop the desegregation issues from mounting. Students from UT-Nashville refused to enroll at TSU. When some did finally enroll, they fought alongside faculty over the curriculum. A plan was implemented to improve academic programs and facilities at TSU, but there was no follow through on this.<sup>84</sup> In 1990, TSU students went on a hunger strike in hopes of bringing attention to condition of the dormitories. A decade later, all parties signed an agreement, which Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman document as achieving four things:

"(1) the elimination of the use of numerical quotas in enrollment and employment at public institutions, (2) enhancing the program offerings in the Nashville campus, (3)

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



granting the school 23 million dollars in renovations and scholarships, and (4) establishing policies for improving cross-racial enrollment and employment.<sup>85</sup>,

The lawsuit was dropped 5 years later when Tennessee met the terms of integration.<sup>86</sup>

The *Sanders v. Ellington* case proves that desegregation is still contentious within educational institutions. The case also proves that the law can only do so much when it comes to forcing higher institutions to desegregate. The contention in the *Sanders v. Ellington* case wasn't that the HBCU didn't want to accept White students, but that TSU lacked the funding to do so. Desegregation alone cannot force integration. The state of Tennessee properly funding the school was just as important as the courts' desegregating the institutions; once the funding was given, integration happened. The merger of TSU wasn't concluded with a struggle.

If *Brown v Board of Education* was the most important case in America public school history, then perhaps the most well-known case in American higher education history is *United States v Fordice*. James Avery filed the case on behalf of his son, a student at Jackson State University in Mississippi.<sup>87</sup> The ruling required Mississippi to discontinue any activity that influenced segregation amongst the institutions.<sup>88</sup> The case was filed in 1975 however, the federal district court decided in 1995 that all state colleges had to remove their racial classifications<sup>89</sup>. Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman noted that "several steps were to be taken, including standardizing the admissions requirements across all eight

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 18.

schools (previously, the five historically white institutions had stricter standards than the three historically black universities) and enacting policies to ensure a certain minimum racial diversity at each university.”<sup>90</sup> While some terms of the ruling were dropped the admission standard requirements remained. This ruling went through a slate of appeals over the course of several years. The case was appealed in 2004 to the U.S. Supreme Court, but they refused to hear it. The Supreme Court’s refusal to hear the case ended the long legal battle.<sup>91</sup> Part of the arrangement was that a \$503 million settlement was to be distributed over a number of years among the three HBCUs in Mississippi.<sup>92</sup> Full access to the funding wouldn’t be received unless the HBCUs enrolled 10 percent non-minorities for three consecutive years (meaning that since HBCUs were predominately black institutions, 10 percent of their students had to be white).<sup>93</sup>

Those criticizing the court’s decision argued that the funding HBCUs received from the settlement seemed inadequate in comparison to the numbers of years African Americans were segregated and given access to an inferior education. Additionally, the ruling negatively affected HBCUs because it forced them to use their settlement money to recruit White students when the money could have been used in areas of infrastructure or resource development. As mentioned earlier, HBCUs had never discriminated on the basis of color,<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Jessica Exkano, “Toward an African Cosmology: Reframing How We Think About Historically Black Colleges And Universities”, *Journal of Black Studies*, 44 no 1, (2012): 71, Date Accessed November 2012,

and although their missions explicitly stated their goals of educating Black students, they did so in response to the inequities of segregation.<sup>95</sup> Jessica Exhano further explains that the “ruling negates special privileges to these institutions in light of desegregation, it undermines the uphill battle they have consistently endured in their mission to successfully educate the descendants of African Americans.”<sup>96</sup> When researching the *US v Fordice* case, Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman discovered that:

“The leaders in Mississippi education note the irony of the federal government’s prohibiting admissions based on quantifiable “affirmative action” (designed to increased Black participation at historically White schools) yet requiring public Black universities to spend public money to recruit a preset number of nonblack students. They also object to the terms of the settlement that out the onus of integration on the three Black universities, noting that the historically White schools’ achievement of greater racial diversity is primarily because of their long histories of relative wealth and prestige.”<sup>97</sup>”

In the minds of critics, the ruling in *US v Fordice* raises more questions than answers about the necessity of HBCUs and the effects of desegregation. Fryer and Greenstone acknowledge the possibilities of HBCUs because of the *Fordice* case:

“At least three outcomes of this ruling seem possible; a decision that HBCUs are indispensable for the education of Black [students] and increase in public funding; increased recruitment and matriculation of White students, which has the potential to undermine the unique mission and culture of these institutions or a decision that HBCUs are no longer necessary (or as necessary), and a commensurate reduction in public financial support.”<sup>98</sup>”

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<http://jbs.sagepub.com/content/44/1/63>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman III. “Unearthing Promise and Potential”, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Roland G Fryer, Michael Greenstone, “The Changing Consequences of Attending Historically

Although the *Brown* decision eliminated legal segregation, many colleges remained predominately White or predominately Black for quite some time. Gradually African Americans began attending TWIs. TWIs had more funding and better resources which appealed to all students. If TWIs wanted to diversify, they had the means to do so. Despite the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling, history has shown that the necessity of HBCUs has not only been questioned by critics and by their peers but by the court as well. Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, and Bowman say that “this is evident by the court’s inability to explicitly uphold HBCUs in the context of both desegregation and integration.”<sup>99</sup> In the court cases presented above, a large sum of money was distributed to the HBCUs involved; however, the long-term wealth disparity made a lasting impact on the educational deficit, so that the money received from the cases was rendered insufficient. Harold Wenglinsky suggests that “the mission of HBCUs has changed little in the face of desegregation, and continues to emphasize that these schools can raise the educational aspirations of African American students, encourage them to enter the professions, and prepare them to become community and political leaders.”<sup>100</sup>

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Black Colleges and Universities “*American Economic Journal* 2 no 1 (2010): 120.

<sup>99</sup> Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, Bowman, “Unearthing Promise and Potential”, 5.

<sup>100</sup> Wenglinsky, “The Educational Justification of Historically Black Colleges and Universities”, 94.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **HBCUs in Transition**

Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf state that “as a whole, changes and consistencies in the significance of race in American society provide an important context for understanding Historically Black Colleges and Universities.”<sup>101</sup> Race has always been a key component in the decision making regarding funding, curriculum creation, and enrollment of higher education in America. The Civil Rights Movement transformed the way America would deal with race and race relations. Many HBCUs were vigilant in the fight for justice. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf argue that “[HBCUs] provided foot soldiers for mass protests, leaders for the Movement, lawyers to argue the cases before courts, and a credentialed intelligentsia equipped to take advantage of hard won opportunities.”<sup>102</sup> HBCUs became the catalyst these students needed to be active in the cause. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf explain HBCUs significance in noting that “graduates from these institutions went on to become major civil rights leaders and holders of a large portion of the nation’s advanced degrees, including Thurgood Marshall, Charles Drew, Marian Wright Elderman, Nikki Giovanni, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”<sup>103</sup> The movement was a demand for equality in areas such as housing, voting, and education. It was now legal for African Americans to occupy the same space as White people. The effect of the Civil Rights Movement transformed HBCUs as well. Albritton explains this by noting that “Historically Black Institutions were no longer the only post-secondary educational option for Black students

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<sup>101</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf “Honoring the Past”, 265.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 266 sourced from (Morris, 1984; Moses, 2001)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 270.

because TWIs were now enrolling them.”<sup>104</sup> TWIs began to attract Black students by the mid-1960s through scholarships and financial aid.<sup>105</sup> The acceptance from TWIs caused the attendance at HBCUs to decrease because prospective students viewed TWIs as providing more financial assistance. On the contrary, HBCU’s leadership altered from mostly White to Black presidents and board members. Brown documents that “according to the Higher Education Act of 1965, Historically Black Colleges and Universities were defined as any accredited institution of higher learning established before 1964 whose principal mission was then and now to the higher education of Black Americans.”<sup>106</sup> The fluctuation of student enrollment continued until there was a steady increase at HBCUs from 1984 to 1994, by nearly 30 percent.<sup>107</sup>

Unfortunately, HBCUs have continued to struggle financially. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf found that the “Title III of the Higher Education Act gave \$170 million dollars between 1987 and 1993 to strengthen infrastructure, academic, and financial resources for HBCUs.”<sup>108</sup> The funding, however, was not enough to assist HBCUs up the economic ladder when compared to TWIs. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf recorded that “between 1993 and 1994, HBCU’s general per student expenditures averaged 88% of that spent by

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<sup>104</sup> Albritton, “Educating Our Own”, 322.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 321.

<sup>106</sup> Brown, “The Declining Significance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities”, 5 sourced from Brown, Donahoo, & Bertrand.

<sup>107</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin and Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 271 via 1998.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 272 via Redd, 1998.

predominately white institutions.”<sup>109</sup> It seemed that HBCUs were given the task of playing “catch-up” financially with TWIs. Since their inception, HBCUs have never been able to compete finically with TWIs, and their financial disparities have kept critics questioning their necessity.<sup>110</sup>

Today, debates over whether or not HBCUs are necessary oscillate between those who believe they no longer serve a purpose and those who argue that HBCUs will ameliorate our society. Palmer insists that “proponents of these institutions argue that their existence is necessary because of their ability to educate many Black students at the college level,”<sup>111</sup> while fostering a nurturing environment. As previously mentioned, the argument that HBCUs are insufficient because student enrollment fluctuates is a fallacy because the critics who make this assumption-, do so without explaining how enrollments affect performance. This assumption also disregards other considerations regarding HBCU’s finances, including the lack of proper resources to recruit students. Critics who oppose funding HBCUs argue that because America has entered a “post-racial era”, these institutions will have to fight for their position in higher education if they want to continue to prove essential in American society. Brown argues that “without careful attention to institutional productivity, academic

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 272 via Hoffman, Snyder and Sonnenberg, 1996

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 272 via Redd, 1998.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Palmer, “The Perceived Elimination of Affirmative Action and the Strengthening of

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Black Colleges and Universities” *Journal of Black Studies* 40 no. 4 (2010): 763 accessed February 2015

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648540>.

performance and positive publicity, the relevance and reputation gained by HBCUs over the past decades can potentially be dismissed and their respect may ‘significantly’ decline.”<sup>112</sup>

## **Chapter Seven:**

### **How Necessary Are HBCUs?**

Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf say that “for scholars considering the historical and contemporary place of race in the politics of education, HBCUs long have been an important subject of inquiry.”<sup>113</sup> One of the reasons why HBCUs remain such a studied and debated topic of discussion is because scholars often feel the necessity of these institutions are solely contingent on the economic, political, and racial climate. During segregation, for example, educational leaders deemed HBCUs necessary because the law prohibited integration; today scholars’ arguments conflict over the mission and funding of HBCUs now that the laws have changed yet racial tension remains. The argument that HBCUs are no longer needed because of integration is a problem because it insinuates that the African American experience starts and stops with integration; and therefore, no school should focus on improving the African American condition. Scholars have discussed and debated the purpose of higher education for African Americans and the role of HBCUs within a “racially stratified society” since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>114</sup> Exhano explains that “HBCUs have been situated in a discourse of systemic otherness, which makes them objects in discussions about

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<sup>112</sup> Brown II, “The Declining Significance of Historically Black Colleges”, 14.

<sup>113</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 265.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 265.



relevancy.”<sup>115</sup> This otherness is perpetuated by racism and heightens the issues surrounding HBCUs, discounting their success and continuing a conversation surrounding their suspected incompetency. This suspected incompetency brings the necessity of HBCUs into question. Racism perpetuates feelings of incompetency, anger, intimidation, and isolation of those being threatened on college campuses. HBCUs are necessary in providing the environment to combat those emotions. Over the past several years, TWIs have been under fire for their alleged racist and discriminatory practices against African Americans.

On March 9, 2015, David Boren, the president of The University of Oklahoma addressed the country in a press conference about the racism on his campus that led to the expulsion of two Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity members.<sup>116</sup> A nine-second video showed several members of the fraternity on a bus chanting, “There will never be a [racial slur] in Sigma Alpha Epsilon.”<sup>117</sup> The chant also referenced that they would lynch African Americans if they showed interest in the fraternity. Boren mentioned in a statement that “there is zero tolerance of this kind of racist behavior at the University of Oklahoma. I hope that the entire nation will join us in having zero tolerance of such racism when it raises its ugly head in other situations across the county.”<sup>118</sup> One of the members of the fraternity mentioned that although there was no excuse for his actions, the chant had been passed down to him from generations prior.

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<sup>115</sup> Exhano, “Toward an African”, 71.

<sup>116</sup> “‘Disgraceful’ University of Oklahoma Fraternity Shuttered After Racist Chant.” CNN.com Last Updated March 9, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKtzclH3iiE>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> OU SAE Chant: ‘There Will Never Be a Nigger in SAW’”, accessed April 03, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDSffcVIVFg>.

Situations like these remind America that despite progress, racist attitudes still exist. In matters concerning higher education, HBCU's necessity remains consistent in its mission to enhance racial equality and uplift African American culture. This example of blatant racism at a TWI furthers the claim that HBCUs are legitimate educational institutions because students should be able to choose an environment that is conducive to their learning and facilitate their interest without the threat of racism, which is provided at HBCUs. Minority-serving institutions do not undermine the right that TWIs have to educate whom they choose, and students can choose to attend either. However, HBCUs' necessity should not be questioned on the grounds that TWIs are integrated. Just because TWIs enroll African Americans does not mean that they necessarily provide the environment or resources they need to thrive. The incident at the University of Oklahoma supports the claim that there is still a need for HBCUs because, had this school been more attuned to diversity, then the students in Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity would have been more aware of the implications of their chant.

Although researchers have been studying HBCUs for decades, most of the studies have not been empirical. In the cases where empirical studies were conducted, the results left the debate open and unsettled. During the 1970s and 1980s, specific aspects of HBCUs were studied to measure differences in educational outcomes between HBCUs and TWIs.<sup>119</sup> Wenglinsky mentions that "the study found that it was not possible to distinguish the impact of industrial characteristics on minority educational attainment from socioeconomic status."<sup>120</sup> Thus, the results were inconclusive. Noting the issue with the studies done on

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<sup>119</sup> Wenglinsky, "The Educational Justification of Historically Black Colleges and Universities", 93.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 93.

HBCUs, Brown explains that “a bulk of the research is heavily colloquial and anecdotal, thereby leaving a void in the academic literature.”<sup>121</sup> The intention of this paper is to synthesize both empirical studies and current events to prove that HBCUs do indeed still serve a purpose in higher education.

Some may believe that HBCUs are all the same. However, they differ in admission size, academic specialties, and private and public institutions. Brown points out their centrality by noting that “one commonality across HBCUs is their historic responsibility as the primary providers of postsecondary education for Black Americans in a social environment of racial discrimination.”<sup>122</sup> In order to affirm their necessity, it must be proven that the social environment at HBCUs is conducive to student success. HBCUs must foster an environment that promotes and demonstrates positive cultural exposure, in an atmosphere free from racial exclusion.

*HBCUs’ Necessity as They Relate to Campus Environment:*

Some argue that HBCUs go against what desegregation was put in place to prevent. Wenglinsky say that “[critics] contend that requiring African Americans to mix with White students will improve their educational experience.”<sup>123</sup> Over the years since the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, HBCUs have integrated significantly. In fact, three HBCUs have a predominantly White student body, and 10 are at least 20 percent non-African American.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Brown, “The Declining Significance”, 4.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Wenglinsky, “The Educational Justification of Historically Black Colleges”, 92.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 94.

The point of those objecting HBCUs based on desegregation is that they argue these institutions undermine or act contrary to the principle of equality. However, HBCUs provide a unique environment that does not exclude or perpetuate racism while emphasizing the educational importance of the African American experience.

The college experience is shaped by the campus environment. If students feel they are in a comfortable environment, they are more likely to perform well in classes and engage in extracurricular activities. When the outcome is negative, it reinforces negative feelings and insecurities, causing the student stress and anxiety.

A focus group done by researchers at UCLA and funded by the Diverse Learning Environment project showed that African Americans were the only group to report struggles with stereotypes on college campuses. In fact, Robin Johnson-Ahorlou “explicitly cited stereotypes and stereotype threat as the biggest barriers to [African Americans] academic success.”<sup>125</sup> The stereotype of African Americans as docile and lazy has affected their perceived treatment at a predominately White colleges. Johnson-Ahorlou says that “these stereotypes have served for the group to be denied equal access and opportunity within our education system.”<sup>126</sup> Focus groups were conducted with African American students who attended schools with less than 6 percent African Americans. The students were given series of questions and were asked to describe what they perceived as major barriers to their

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<sup>125</sup> Robin Nicole Johnson-Ahorlou, “Our biggest challenge is stereotypes: Understanding Stereotype Threat and the Academic Experiences of African American Undergraduates,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82 vol 4 (2013): 382

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 385, Valencia 1997.

academic achievement at each institution.<sup>127</sup> One student from the study said, “I think going into classes...you’re looked down upon or there’s an assumption that you’re not going to achieve at a high level and then people are shocked when you’re the best in the class to speak.”<sup>128</sup> Another student stated, “once you get in [the university]...there is an expectation ...that students of color, they’re not gonna [do well]...There’s definitely been issues...and there’s actually White students that have said some pretty racist stuff.”<sup>129</sup> The threat of stereotypes does not stop with the students. One student shared, “Faculty and staff have stereotypes about African Americans. I hear them in class all the time.”<sup>130</sup> One of the students felt like they African Americans were being constantly watched in the classroom by their peers and questioned by their intelligence. The students reported feeling isolated, and said that their ideas and concerns about racism would not be heard by faculty since, in some cases, it was the faculty who were stereotyping the students.

Fryer and Greenstone assess that “a counterargument for the setting of HBCUs is that the separation of racial groups across universities concerns the importance of interracial contact in mediating stereotypes and promoting understanding and tolerance.”<sup>131</sup> Yet, this study proves that some students at TWI campuses benefit from a racially accepting

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 386.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 387.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Fryer, Greenstone, “The Changing Consequences of Attending a Historically Black

atmosphere. The stress of being on a campus where students feels they are constantly judged became too much for some. One student from the focus group stated: “It’s really sad that I think African Americans and a lot of other cultures...we think about so much. It’s not just go to school, sit in class, do well. It’s like things are going on and you’re thinking about things. Like...we gotta prove that we deserve to be here...there’s too much going on.”<sup>132</sup> It is evident that the participants in this focus group believe the pressures of their environment negatively affect their academic journey. The pressures of feeling excluded caused many of the students to withdraw and search for other students who look like them. One student from the study said that, “I feel like that’s the first thing that you [do] when you walk into a room...you look for other Black students and usually don’t see [any]...It makes you feel like you have to represent.”<sup>133</sup>

Contrary to the argument that HBCUs promote social exclusion, although the environment structure of these institutions promote the expression of African American culture, they do not undermine or ignore the needs of others. When the threat of stereotypes is eliminated, self-esteem and morale increases. This may explain why the graduation rate for African Americans was less than 45 percent at the TWIs where the focus groups were conducted.<sup>134</sup>

A study done by Wenglinsky concluded that African American students experienced a higher degree of student –to- student interaction than White students, regardless of the

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<sup>132</sup> Johnson-Ahorlou, “Our biggest challenge is stereotypes”, 82.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 389.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 390.

institution that they attended.<sup>135</sup> One can conclude from Wenglinsky's study that since African American students seek interaction more and are affected by stereotypes more than White students, an environment consistent with African American values benefits them. The positive campus environment at HBCUs correlates to why their graduation rates are higher than those for Black students at predominantly White colleges.<sup>136</sup> HBCUs were the first institutions in the south to accept any student regardless of race, creed, or sex. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf contend "therefore, along with the Black students, HBCU campuses often educated the children of the White missionaries, Native Americans, poor Whites, and international students from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean."<sup>137</sup> The history of acceptance and inclusion attests to the nurturing environment students feel at HBCUs. HBCUs were established to educate African Americans, but their institutions are non-exclusive and accepting of everyone. The lower tuition rates benefit those from less economically privileged backgrounds. The growing number of HBCUs with a majority White student body proves that White students benefit from the environment and the education provided at these institutions. HBCUs emphasizes uplifting African American culture without undermining others despite their culture, having a history of being ridiculed and misrepresented in higher education in America. Early advocates for HBCUs understood their educational and environmental significance. They appreciated the campus environment of HCBUs.

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<sup>135</sup> Wenglinsky, "The Educational Justification of Historically Black Colleges", 97.

<sup>136</sup> Pamela, Bennett. Yu Xie. "Revisiting Differences in College Attendance: The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities", *American Sociological Association*. 68 no. 4 (2003): 569 date accessed March 2015.

<sup>137</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, "Honoring the Past", 268.

In addressing the issues that threatened to change a HBCUs' campus environment, Kathryn Borman and Sherman Dorn documents that "Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), former FAMU President George W. Gorge Jr., argued that African American people wanted integration but not at the expense of downgrading, closing, or merging Black institutions."<sup>138</sup> After the Civil Rights Movement there was talk of the merging of FAMU (an HBCU) with Florida State University (FSU), a TWI. The FAMU community was not opposed to segregation but feared that their environment would be threatened by a group of individuals who had a history of not taking their educational needs seriously. Borman and Dorn said that "while the African American community was adamantly opposed to segregation, members of the community supported segregated higher education at FAMU—unless they could be assured that FAMU would be desegregated in a balanced relationship with Traditionally White Institutions."<sup>139</sup> The efforts of the community were not in vain. Borman and Dorn note that "FAMU continued to be an autonomous institution due to its important role in a constantly changing society, and integration continued moving forward in that same society,"<sup>140</sup> proving both can coexist.

The example of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon chant confirms that an institution (or members of an institution) can be desegregated yet not fully accepting of all students. Two of the students involved in the incident were expelled and the fraternity was disbanded.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Kathryn M. Borman, Sherman Dorn. *Education Reform in Florida: Diversity and Equity in Public Policy*, New York: New York Press, 2007, 43.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>141</sup> "'Disgraceful' University of Oklahoma Fraternity Shuttered After Racist Chant." CNN.com



Even though the school reprimanded the students, it doesn't change the effect. The students' punishment shows that the university does not agree with the chant, but it does not take away the engrained sentiment because the incident occurred in the first place. This is not say that TWIs overall are non-accepting of minority students; however, their history suggests that in many cases it has not always been this way. Borman and Dorn recognize that "HBCUs provides emotional, social and academic support that isn't always available to all at other institutions."<sup>142</sup> Despite desegregation and efforts to alter the perception, students suffer from inclusivity which interferes with their ability to have a healthy, productive college experience.

*HBCUs Necessity to Student Success:*

The purpose of higher education is to produce successful leaders and productive individuals to contribute to the workforce and strengthen the economy. In general, students who attend HBCUs come from less privilege socioeconomic background and have lower high school grade point averages (GPA's) than those who attend TWIs. The perceived goal of a college degree is that it paves a way for a job or further education. Critics believe that HBCUs are insufficiently preparing students for post-college life.<sup>143</sup> As mentioned earlier, the empirical research on HBCUs is limited and that number becomes even more significant in the cases of comparing post-college success rates of HBCU students against those that attend TWIs. The empirical study done by Fryer and Greenstone assessed the consequences

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Last Updated March 9, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKtzclH3iiE>.

<sup>142</sup> Borman, Dorn, *Education Reform in Florida*, 39.

<sup>143</sup> Fryer, Greenstone. "The Changing Consequences of Attending Historically Black Colleges", 114.

of HBCU attendance rather than theories and historical anecdotes.<sup>144</sup> The study found that African Americans may no longer benefit economically from attending HBCUs. Fryer and Greenstone's study found that "in the 1970's, HBCU matriculation was associated with higher wages and an increased probability of graduation relative to attending a TWI."<sup>145</sup> Twenty years later, there was a noticeable decrease in wages; 20 percent decrease to be exact. Fryer and Greenstone concluded this study by stating:

"In summary, the evidence in this study suggests that relative to TWIs, HBCUs may have provided unique educational services for blacks in the 1970s. However by the 1990s, this advantage seems to have disappeared on many dimensions and, by some measures, HBCU attendance appears to retard black progress."<sup>146,</sup>

This study contends that the necessity of HBCUs are in the balance although it could not provide evidence for a conclusion regarding why the wages increased. It suggested that the decrease in wages for HBCU graduates in the 90s could have been because of the TWIs ability to target Black students, but the study could not decisively prove this.

Another study, this one by Mikyong Minsun Kim was conducted to examine the impact HBCUs have on early career earnings for Black students.<sup>147</sup> Kim explains the process of the study: "the term 'early career earnings' means that this study's earnings data are based on the early stage of career income after a baccalaureate degree (up to nine years after the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Mikyong, Minsun Kim, "Early Career Earnings of African American Students: The Impact of

Attendance at Historically Black Colleges versus White Colleges and Universities" *The Journal of Negro Education*. 80 no 4

(2011): 505. Date Accessed February 2005 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41341156>.

student entered college).”<sup>148</sup> The study sought to discover if there were differences in college preparation, such as preparation for graduation programs, amongst the colleges and universities. The analysis concluded that African American students who attended TWIs were better prepared in terms of attending college based on their mean high school GPAs. However, upon attending college, Kim’s study found that “77 percent of Black students who attended HBCUs reported that their job-related skills became stronger, as opposed to 70.4 percent of [TWI] graduates.”<sup>149</sup> The study also noted that students at HBCUs were more prepared to attend graduate schools than their TWI peers. In the issue of wages, the study did not find any significant increase or decrease in earnings across the board between the institutions. Kim concludes that “in other words, HBCUs are doing as well as TWIs in producing African American graduates who are financially successful—at least in the early part of their careers.”<sup>150</sup>

Despite accepting students who may not be admitted into other schools, HBCUs also produce students who are able to transition into the workforce successfully. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf found that “thirty-four percent of Black freshmen at HBCUs in 2004 were considered low-income.”<sup>151</sup> Many of the students attending HBCUs are the first in their immediate family to attend college. In addition, Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf that “HERI data indicate 12.9% of fathers and 7.7% of mothers of Black freshmen had not earned a high

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 505.

<sup>149</sup> Kim, “Early Career Earnings of African American Students, 513.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 514.

<sup>151</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 273 Allen et al., 2005.

school diploma.”<sup>152</sup> It is also important to note that although HBCUs differ in size and scope, they are similar in the fact that they have more limited resources than most TWIs, yet they foster the development of many working-class individuals.

*HBCUs’ Necessity as It Relates to Funding:*

Financially, HBCUs are in desperate need of improvement. The financial deficit of HBCUs has critics continuously questioning their value. As previously outlined, despite having limited funding, HBCUs continuously produce successful students because of the comfortable and productive environment. Therefore, it can be assumed that any money given to HBCUs would further their growth and the growth of their students. However, critics still feel that since HBCUs lack the funding necessary to provide valuable resources, they should either be combined (in an effort to save money) or closed down.

State legislatures may not directly say they want to close HBCUs, but their actions prove that they are not proponents. Albritton explains, “for example, House Speaker Jim Tucker and Senator Conrad Appel recently sponsored a bill in the Louisiana State Legislature that recommended that Southern University at New Orleans merge with the predominantly White University at New Orleans to create the University of Louisiana at New Orleans.”<sup>153</sup> The merger proposal failed. Had it passed, Southern University would have no longer been a Historical Black Institution. Similarly, Governor Barbour suggested the merger of Mississippi Valley State University, Alcorn State University, and Jackson State University to cut down on administrative fees.<sup>154</sup> No merger took place, however the message is clear. The

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 273.

<sup>153</sup> Albritton, “Educating Our Own”, 323.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 324.

fewer the funds HBCUs have, the harder they will have to work to prove that they are necessary.

The past financial disparities still affect HBCUs, which contributes to their accreditation issues. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf explain that “although financial support via federal investment in HBCUs had increased over time, several private institutions, including Morris Brown College, Mary Holmes, Grambling State University, Bennett College, and Talladega, were denied accreditation or sanctioned for not securing adequate facilities and/or financial resources.”<sup>155</sup> Once Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) removes accreditation from an institution, the schools credits are no longer transferable and the school loses credibility.

There are several reasons why closing or combining schools is not the answer for solving the financial crisis of HBCUs. There has always been a large gap in the distribution of funds between HBCUs and TWIs. TWIs, in part due to slavery and Jim Crow, had a head start toward financial security. From their inception, most HBCUs were meek and suffered issues due to lack of funding, while several TWIs were thriving financially from the slave trade. It is unjust to expect institutions to live up to financial standards of TWIs. Suggesting the merging of HBCUs due to financial issues undermines the accomplishments of these institutions and misrepresents them. As mentioned previously, HBCUs service students who may not have otherwise had an opportunity to receive a college education. The solution to educating those students is not taking a platform of learning away from them because of the institutions’ limited funds; the solution is to give HBCUs the funds. African American

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<sup>155</sup>

Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past,” 272, Reaves, 2006.

students, more than any other group, experience obstacles on their path to higher education participation and attainment.<sup>156</sup> Albritton notes that “these barriers include social backgrounds that are incongruous with Eurocentric campus climates, limited financial resources, and trepidation of school failure.<sup>157</sup>”

An allocation of equal funding per student amongst the public colleges would promote the financial health of HBCUs. Colorado voted to legalize marijuana in order to tax the buyers. One of the benefits of this taxation is that some of the money is set aside for education. In the same way Colorado implemented a plan that gave millions of dollars to education, so can the states that have HBCUs. Taxing marijuana would mean that no funding would be pulled from other areas. A higher education fund can be set aside with HBCUs and TWIs receiving an equal amount. HBCU alumni, students, and administration can put pressure on the states to advocate for legalizing marijuana because it would rid the state legislatures of having to squeeze funding for HBCUs.

The way funds are distributed now shows that state legislatures do not take the education at HBCUs as seriously as they do TWIs. For an example we can look to Alabama. Albritton found that “in 2007, African American students made up only 8 percent (1,883) of the enrollment at Auburn University and the school received \$228 million in state support. However, Alabama’s two HBCUs, Alabama State and Alabama A&M only received \$87

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<sup>156</sup> Albritton, “Educating Our Own”, 325, Brown and Davis (2001),

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

million dollars combined.”<sup>158</sup> It is evident that the students at HBCUs should receive more funding.

Another example is documented by Gerrelyn Patterson, Yolanda Dunston and Kisha Daniels. The authors reveal that “in 2009, North Carolina State University received more than 18,000 per student whereas Fayetteville State University (an HBCU) received less than 10,000.”<sup>159</sup> The size of the institutions should be taken into account when discussing the allocation of funds; however, demographics must also be examined. One of the reasons tuition costs are lower at HBCUs than TWIs is because many students’ economic status would not allow them to attend institutions with higher tuitions. 90 percent of students who attend HBCUs accept financial aid,<sup>160</sup> including those who attend the Historically Black Community Colleges. If HBCUs do not get enough federal or state support, then they must rely on student tuition. Auburn is considerably larger than Alabama State, so they arguably need greater funding. In 2007, Over 26 percent of Alabama’s population was African American and economically hindered from pursuing a degree.<sup>161</sup> Some might argue that closing HBCUs would not prevent students from seeking a degree at a TWI, especially since TWIs appear to have more financially to offer. However, since most of the students who attend HBCUs have lower SAT scores and parents struggle more financially, chances are the students may not be accepted or cannot afford to attend a TWI. Those students should not be

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 324, Minor p. 23 (2008).

<sup>159</sup> Gerrelyn C. Patterson, Yolanda L. Duston, Kisha N. Daniels. “Extreme Makeover: Preserving the HBCU Mission Through Service Learning Pedagogy” (2013): 155. .

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 324. Minor 2008, pg. 23.

excluded from a college education. In the cases where students do have adequate G.P.A.'s and proper funding, they might simply prefer a place where they feel more comfortable. The attendance at HBCUs prove that it is not that students at these institutions do not want to go to college or are incapable of performing once they arrive. However, the less funds HBCUs receive, the harder it is going to continue to be for students to obtain the education to which they aspire. Albritton argues that "furthermore, consideration of how HBCUs have been historically underfunded demands that legislators consider how their funding decisions impact the education opportunities available to African American students."<sup>162</sup> Keep in mind that past attempts at allocating HBCUs proper funding have been unsettled or insufficient.

Albritton reminds us that "sponsors of the Second Morrill Act adopted a contradictory stance, which ensured that new land-grant HBCUs would in no way be on equal footing with their White counterparts."<sup>163</sup> The state must implement plans to ensure the longevity of HBCUs because they are indeed necessary. Albritton explains the unfairness of state funding. Contending that "the insufficient financial support offered by individual states further hampered the institutional capacity for long-term financial solvency and the acquisition of physical resources on par with their predominantly White counterparts."<sup>164</sup> The continuation of the unequal disbursement of funds has continued to affect HBCUs negatively. The states should take further accountability and acknowledgment in the role they played in the past and the current financial status of HBCUs. Both TWIs and HBCUs have an obligation to educate students. However, that doesn't mean that smaller schools don't deserve adequate funding. In

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<sup>162</sup> Albritton, "Educating Our Own", 324.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 316

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 316.



addition to the taxation of legal marijuana, perhaps a new system should be set in place offering financial incentives, recognizing that HBCUs haven't had the time or the money to acquire the best resources.

Dissolving learning institutions is not the solution because without the support and opportunities offered by HBCUs, many African American students would not have the privilege of receiving a college education.<sup>165</sup> The suggestions to close or combine HBCUs is not conducive for the students and only creates the problem of keeping funds away from students who need them.

### **Conclusion:**

HBCUs are unique and resilient institutions. Racial injustices and attitudes shaped the conditions of higher education in America. A hierarchy denied Black people access to any education, while White people (particularly males) had the ability to choose among several institutions. This placed African Americans at a disadvantage economically, socially and financially. Historical Black Institutions were African American answers to America's treatment of them.

One of the most recent examples of racism on a college campus occurred at Duke University. On April 1, 2015, a noose was found hanging from a tree. Students at Duke reported that they felt the racial tensions mount over the years and furthermore, felt threatened emotionally and physically. The investigation is ongoing. The administration at Duke has said that the person who committed the act will be punished. The noose promoted an immediate protest. This incident also provoked conversation about racism on TWI campuses.

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<sup>165</sup>

Ibid, 325.

This thesis suggests that despite progress, there is still a color line in America and it affects higher education. As long as this color line exists, Wilson agrees that “there will always be students who will want a singular educational experience that reinforces their gender, ethnic or religious traditions.<sup>166</sup>” HBCUs necessity relies on their ability to continue to educate thousands while being the “underdogs” of higher education. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf recognize the importance of HBCUs. The authors understand that “regardless of the perils of HBCUs as educators of the Black youth and centers of social and political struggle, their local and societal values are immeasurable.<sup>167</sup>” The presence of HBCUs are necessary because without them, thousands of graduates would have gone without a college education. Palmer proclaims that “despite limited resources, HBCUs manage to create an environment in which African Americans are educated regardless of academic preparation, test scores, socioeconomic status, or environmental circumstances.”<sup>168</sup>

The question of HBCUs necessity is distinctly tied to economics.<sup>169</sup> Since the beginning, HBCUs have struggled financially; the prediction is that this problem will only increase as the economy continues to see-saw. Board of trustee members and leaders of the community must find a way to advocate for more state funds if they want to ensure that

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<sup>166</sup> Wilson, “Can Black Colleges Solve the Problem”, 454.

<sup>167</sup> Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, “Honoring the Past”, 273.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Palmer, “The Perceived Elimination of Affirmative Action and the Strengthening of Historically Black Colleges and Universities”, *Journal of Black Studies* 40 no 4 (2010): 764 date accessed February 2015,  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40648540> via Allen & Jewell, 2002; Kim, 2002; Kim & Conrad, 2006.

<sup>169</sup> Albritton, “Educating Our Own”, 329.

HBCUs remain. There must be financial attention brought to the needs of HBCUs. Palmer agrees that the solution in securing the necessity of HBCUs is gaining access to more funding. Palmer argues that “an increase in financial resources would enable HBCUs to aggressively recruit more students, upgrade key resources and hire additional faculty, making it feasible for them to better serve the influx of students who may enroll in Black colleges.”<sup>170</sup> Room for growth is not a call for the dismal or consolidation of HBCUs. This thesis mentions the taxation of legal marijuana as a solution to help funding HBCUs. In addition, HBCUs may benefit from alumni-led financial campaign. The age of social media has left the doors open for alumni and community leaders to raise money. Instead of attempting to raise money separately, perhaps coordinating with all of the HBCUs and starting a nationwide fundraising campaign would gain faster social media attention. Social websites such as Facebook and Twitter are platforms that reach a large amount of people in a relatively short amount of time. In order to promote the growth Black neighborhoods, part of the money received from the campaign could go back into the same communities where the HBCUs are. The national attention gained from the fundraising campaign could help the pressure the state to allocate more funds to HBCUs. At the very least the attention from the campaign would force states to acknowledge the effort HBCUs are making in seeking more funds.

There is a lack of empirical research conducted in relation to HBCUs’ success rate, environment strengths and financial potential in comparison to TWIs. Perhaps more empirical research in these areas will continue to prove that the educational quality received at HBCUs equal to that of TWIs. This conclusion will hopefully prompt more federal and

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<sup>170</sup>

Palmer, “The Perceived Elimination of Affirmative Action,” 772.

state leaders to pour funds into HBCUs. This thesis proves that HBCUs exceed at educating without receiving proper funds. More funding, prompts more resources that can be used for recruiting more students and preparing them with the skills they need to contribute to America's workforce. It seems that despite all evidence the need to prove HBCUs' "educational value" is not going away. Empirical studies could inform the debate.

The future of HBCUs has yet to be determined. However, if their future is anything like their past and their present: although tested they will continue, tried and true. Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf point out that "we see the definition and reality of HBCUs morphing, driven by changes in American demographic, economic, political and social patterns."<sup>171</sup> Once being the only place that educated African Americans, HBCUs educate all races while maintaining their unique mission in acknowledging the African American experience. It would be imperative of all scholars, state and community leaders to take a special interest in HBCUs. The main objective of this thesis is to raise awareness of the necessity of HBCUs. While the intention is to add to the conversation discussing HBCUs necessity, their need for funding is legitimate and therefore, more suggestions on rectifying the problem are needed. Even in the mist of financial inconsistency, HBCUs continue to educate thousands of students. The reason HBCUs are necessary is simple; students still need them. HBCUs still contribute to the higher education of America in a positive and productive way.

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<sup>171</sup>

Allen, Jewell, Griffin, Wolf, "Honoring the past", 275.

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